The Adequacy of Savings

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Central to the formulation of public policy towards Social Security and private pensions is the question: how adequately do people save for their old age? The widely accepted life cycle and permanent income hypotheses of savings presume that individuals plan their consumption path over their lifetimes in a way that maximizes their satisfaction. Public policy regarding the financing of old age consumption is based on a very different view. The essential premise underlying the Social Security system, as well as government tax breaks for private pensions, is that left to their own devices, large numbers of people would fail to save adequately and find themselves destitute in their old age. While our Social Security and private pension systems perform a number of functions in the area of income redistribution and insurance, their primary function is to force individuals to save for their old age. This, potentially, prevents personal suffering and reduces the demand for general welfare.

To date, very little empirical work has directly addressed the question of the adequacy of accumulation. In the first systematic study of this problem, Peter Diamond (1977) concluded that in the absence of Social Security, a substantial fraction of the population would be inadequately prepared for retirement. The Interim Report of the President's Commission on Pension Policy (1979) reached a similar conclusion.

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This paper uses newly available data from the Social Security Administration's *Retirement History Survey* to examine the adequacy of saving. This data source is particularly rich; survey data for respondents covering the years 1969, 1971, and 1973 have been matched with Social Security earnings records covering the years dating back to 1951. In addition to information on the path of lifetime earnings, the survey contains extensive data on individual asset holdings. The evidence indicates that surprisingly few couples currently suffer significant reductions in their standard of living in their old age. This appears due, in large part, to our compulsory savings institutions, the Social Security and private pension systems. These institutions have succeeded in redistributing the lifetime consumption of private individuals from their youth to their old age.

Section I examines potential causes of undersaving and considers the scope for public policies. The data and methods of analysis used are described in Section II. Section III discusses the results regarding the current adequacy of retirement savings. Section IV seeks to explain differences in the adequacy of preparation for retirement. Section V presents conclusions and discusses some implications for future research.

I. Undersaving and Public Policy

Market economies traditionally respect consumer sovereignty. Economists typically do not attempt to examine the wisdom of consumers' choices between good x and good y, work and leisure, or risk and return. Nor do public policies typically seek to affect these decisions. Why then should choices regarding the intertemporal allocation of consumpconsumption be subject to special scrutiny?

There are several possible rationales for public intervention in private savings decisions. Paternalism may be appropriate in this

context even if not in other, static situations. Decisions about retirement savings are unique in their irreversibility. An individual cannot retrospectively enjoy his wealth, nor can he undo his previous consumption. This problem of irreversibility is heightened by the likelihood of changing tastes. The saver may well have very different goals, tastes, and desires when he retires than at the time the savings decision is made.

Costs of information processing and decision making provide a second possible justification for paternalistic policies. Individuals may find it difficult or unpleasant to confront the possibility of forced early retirement or disability. If these contingencies are sufficiently unlikely or remote, the utility costs of making choices may exceed the expected utility gain from insuring against unpleasant, remote events. Welfare might then be increased by public planning for these contingencies. A third case for paternalism emphasizes the difficulty of rational decision making. Because of the long lag between action and consequences, and the large number of uncertainties involving low probability events, intertemporal consumption decisions are likely to be particularly difficult.

Even if paternalistic arguments are rejected out of hand, there is a second potential justification for forced savings. By requiring individuals to save, society avoids the negative externality that the *ex post* improvident might otherwise generate. A precondition for this argument is obviously interdependent utility; under this assumption, forcing individuals to save eliminates the ability of a few to "free ride" on the generosity of many.

Even if one grants a rationale for government intervention in private savings decisions, the question remains whether such intervention can succeed. This depends on the type of "deficiency" in individual decision making as well as the constraints against borrowing in capital markets.

First, consider the length of the savings horizon in the presence of perfect capital markets. If individuals have lifelong, or because of a concern for the welfare of their descendents, infinitely long, savings horizons, they will consider future resources in determining current and future consumption. After consulting their current intertemporal consumption preferences, some or many nonmyopic individuals could plan to consume at a significantly higher level during their youth than during their old age. Other individuals, in general, and public officials, in particular, may view this intertemporal choice as perverse, if not stupid. They may suspect that it will be regretted subsequently. Indeed, policymakers may be sufficiently disturbed to attempt to force these "irrational, but nonmyopic" undersavers to save more for their old age. If this attempt to require additional savings takes the form of our current Social Security system (i.e., of forced contributions when young in return for retirement benefits when old), public policy will fail to achieve its desired goal. This is simply because of the existence of perfect capital markets. In the presence of perfect capital markets, private irrational, but nonmyopic savers will undo a forced government savings plan of the Social Security variety by reducing their own savings out of disposable income and maintaining the original intertemporal consumption allocation plan. Note that if mandatory Social Security tax contributions are sufficiently large, these irrational, but nonmyopic savers will borrow against their future Social Security benefits. Borrowing against future Social Security benefits would presumably occur, however, only after the individual's private net worth was depleted.

Myopic savers, in contrast to irrational but nonmyopic savers, may simply not think about the future in deciding how much to consume today. In the extreme, they may consume all their disposable income as well as inherited assets in each period that they receive these streams. A less-severe form of myopia might entail a rule-of-thumb method of determining how much to consume and how much to save, such as "save 5 percent of all received flows." In this case of myopia, a forced Social Security savings program can indeed change the intertemporal allocation of consumption. Since myopic individuals do not foresee future Social Security benefits,

they will lower their current consumption in response to the Social Security tax or pension contribution rather than simply reduce their own private savings.

When capital markets are imperfect, forced savings policies may be effective even in the case of irrational, but nonmyopic savers. The capital market imperfection we have in mind here is an inability to borrow against future streams. Forced contributions to savings plans may lead to a reduction in consumption when young to the extent that the constraint against borrowing against future streams is binding. This constraint may become binding even for individuals who have positive net worth; it may be impossible, or at least very difficult, to consume illiquid assets, such as the equity in one's house. In addition, irrational, but nonmyopic savers may have short-term savings goals, such as the education of their children, that preclude a reduction in their net worth below a certain level. This discussion suggests that individuals with the greatest level of net worth and earnings relative to the size of the involuntary savings contribution will be the least constrained by imperfect capital markets and would provide a better test for irrational, but nonmyopic saving in a world with imperfect capital markets.

For myopic savers, public policy will be effective whether or not capital markets are imperfect; myopic savers, by definition, do not foresee or think about future resource streams and, hence, will never attempt to borrow against those streams. As in the case of nonmyopic, but possibly borrowing-constrained, savers, the strongest test for myopic undersaving will be among that group of savers who have been least affected by forced savings policies. These points about the effectiveness of forced savings policies are summarized in Figure 1.

	Unconstrained Savers	Constrained Savers
Nonmyopic Savers	Ineffective	Effective
Myopic Savers	Effective	Effective

FIGURE 1. EFFECTIVENESS OF FORCED SAVINGS POLICIES

II. Testing for Undersavings

Tests of myopia or irrationality on the part of consumers must be somewhat arbitrary. Any consumption path can be justified as optimal using some utility function. Our test is based on the premise that rational consumers would be unlikely to plan ahead for significant reductions in consumption levels in their later years.

The test for significant undersaving involves a comparison of the constant level of old-age consumption that can be financed by the elderly based on their resources in old age with the constant level of lifetime consumption they could have financed based on the lifetime resources available at the start of their lives. This analysis is based on the actual realized pattern of voluntary and involuntary savings. The comparison of these consumption levels provides an entirely valid test for significant undersaving only in the case of nonmyopic, unconstrained savers. For this group, public forced savings policy will not alter the intertemporal allocation of consumption. As mentioned above, focusing on that group of savers for whom forced saving is a small fraction of lifetime earning will increase the power of the test. For myopic savers as well, the group with the smallest ratio of forced savings to earnings will be the group with the greatest potential for exhibiting substantial undersaving.

There is another, but more extreme, way to examine the evidence concerning the current adequacy of savings. This is simply to assume that all forced savings would otherwise have been consumed, and to compare the level of old-age consumption resources with lifetime consumption resources, ignoring those forced savings assets. In addition to presenting results based on total old-age assets, Section IV examines the data under the counterfactual assumption that Social Security had never existed; that is, both Social Security taxes and benefits are ignored in computing the levels of lifetime and old-age consumption. This obviously biases the results towards a finding of undersaving for those nonmyopic as well as myopic savers

who would have saved some fraction, if not all, of their Social Security taxes.

So far, our discussion has carefully avoided questions of uncertainty. One major risk that affects intertemporal consumption decisions is the uncertainty of the date of death. Economic theory suggests that this risk can be completely hedged by the purchase of actuarially fair annuities. In the United States, private markets do not appear to provide actuarially fair, or, indeed even indexed, annuities. Private purchase of annuities is rare. Less than 3 percent of respondents in the *Retirement History Survey* report ownership of annuities. On the other hand, virtually everyone owns annuities in the form of Social Security benefits, pension benefits, and old-age labor earnings. In addition, Kotlikoff and Spivak (1981) suggest that a sizable fraction of the risk of death can be hedged by risk pooling within families. Even very small families can substitute to a significant degree for an actuarially fair annuities market. For example, two-member families, such as a husband and a wife, or a father and son, can capture close to 50 percent of the insurance gains from perfect markets; three-member families can capture close to 70 percent. Furthermore, this family risk pooling does not depend on altruism; complete selfishness is perfectly compatible with family risk pooling of this kind. Given the significant risk-pooling opportunities among family and friends, and given the significant level of Social Security and pension annuities as well as survival contingent labor earnings, most nonmyopic individuals may well formulate their intertemporal consumption plans as if they were purchasing perfectly fair, real annuities.

If one grants that selfish, implicit family annuity contracting may account for a substantial amount of the annuity insurance acquired by the elderly, one needs to ask how this family contracting alters reported old-age resources relative to what one would observe if the elderly acquired all their annuity insurance in the public market. There is reason to believe that in the case of family annuity contracting, the reported old-age resource position of the elderly measures the extent of their potential old-age consumption, and that these reported old-age resources are not encumbered by substantial amounts of implicit debt to children. Indeed, if reported old-age resources do not reflect true potential future consumption, it is more likely that they understate rather than overstate true old-age resources; that is, it seems more likely that children would have outstanding contingent liabilities to their parents in the form, for example, of paying for old-age nursing care, than that the parents would owe money to their children in return for prior payments from their children. Hence, if there is a bias in our comparison of potential old-age consumption relative to potential lifetime consumption, the comparison is likely to be biased towards a finding of inadequate old-age resources.

Since the extent to which consumption choices are subject to the risk of death is in doubt, we present our comparisons of old-age consumption with lifetime consumption for the two polar cases of perfect annuity markets and no annuity markets. For the case of perfect annuity markets, we compute the ratio R_A, where

$$(1) \qquad R_A = C_A^0 / C_A^L.$$

In (1), C_A^0 is the level annuity that can be purchased when old given the present expected value of old age resources PER^0; C_A^L is the level annuity that can be purchased when young based on the present expected value of lifetime resources PER^L. The annuities C_A^0 and C_A^L are in turn calculated as

$$(2) \qquad C_A^0 = \frac{PER^0}{PEF^0}; \qquad C_A^L = \frac{PER^L}{PEF^L}.$$

The terms PEF^0 and PEF^L are, respectively, present expected value factors when old and young. They equal the sum from the initial age a^* of the probabilities of surviving to age a, divided by the discount factor $(1+r)^{a-a^*}$, where r is the market rate of interest.

When annuities are not available, expected utility maximizers will not equate the present expected value of consumption to the present expected value of lifetime resources; rather, they will equate the present value of planned consumption over the lifetime to the present

value of resources. For this case, we compute the ratio R, where

$$R = C^0/C^L. \tag{3}$$

The terms C^0 and C^L are, respectively, the constant levels of planned consumption based on the present value of old-age resources and the present value of lifetime resources that can be financed over all the possible remaining years of one's life. In this study, 88 is taken to be the maximum age of death. The formulae for C^0 and C^L are simply the ratio of present resources from the age in question to the present value factor from the age in question through age 88.

In the case of married couples, the terms C_A^0, C_A^L, C^0, and C^L refer to the constant streams that each spouse could consume based on the combined lifetime and old-age resources of the two spouses. The present and present expected value factors used to compute C^0, C^L, C_A^0, and C_A^L are the sum of the husband's and wife's present and present expected value factors.

III. Data and Sample Selection

The Social Security Administration's *Retirement History Survey* (*RHS*) was initiated in 1969. Since that time, four additional panels of data have been collected in the years 1971, 1973, 1975, and 1977 from the initial respondents. This paper uses data from the 1969, 1971, and 1973 surveys. The initial 1969 *RHS* sampled 11,152 respondents between the ages of 58 and 63. The sampling procedures, etc., are described in L. Irelan et al. Both the 1969 and 1971 surveys provide data that are used to calculate household net worth, including equity in residential and nonresidential real estate.

In each of the years, the survey respondents were asked numerous questions concerning current or expected pension benefits. The respondents also indicated their working status and expected age of retirement. This information was processed to calculate the present expected value of pension wealth (*PENW*) as of the respondent's age in 1969. Pension benefits were taken to begin in the first year the respondent reports receiving benefits, or in the year the respondent indicated he or she will retire, whichever is earliest. We assume that the reported pension benefit remains fixed in nominal value over time. Survival probabilities are taken from a 1966 Social Security Administration Actuarial Study.

Martin Feldstein's (1974) and Kotlikoff's (1979) procedures are followed to calculate the present expected value of gross Social Security wealth (*SSW*). The basic benefit for each respondent and his or her spouse is computed using the 1969 Social Security Benefit Schedules. Across-the-board increases in real Social Security benefits after 1969 are not included in the calculations. The Social Security Primary Insurance Amount (*PIA*) is calculated from the respondent's reported earnings history. The *SSW* calculation takes into account dependent and survivor benefits as well as basic retirement benefits. Benefits are taken to begin at the age of retirement. An individual's age of retirement was determined, if possible, from the Social Security earnings file. If a respondent was still working in 1974, his or her retirement age was taken to be the 1973 expected retirement age. Respondents who said they would never retire were assumed to retire at age 70.

The procedure of using actual outcomes in calculating the present expected value of pension and Social Security streams in 1969 was also followed in computing the present expected value of future labor earnings (*FUTW*). The actual value of earnings was estimated from the Social Security earnings records up to 1974. If a respondent indicated in 1973 that he or she expected to work after 1974, we assumed that the respondent continued to earn at the 1974 real earnings level until retirement.[1] Earnings between 1951 and 1969 were obtained from the Social Security earnings records. Earnings prior to 1951 are not reported in the data. Each respondent's earnings back to age 30 are estimated by taking the average earnings between 1953 and 1956 and extrapolating this figure backwards starting in 1950 and applying the

[1]In 1969, 18 percent of the couples included in our analysis were retired.

economy-wide growth rates of real earnings. Since the typical respondent was age 41 in 1950, this imputation procedure was used for about eleven years of earnings.

In the computations, all earnings and benefit streams are first converted into real 1969 dollars. A 2 percent real interest rate was assumed in the calculations. Tabulations were also constructed using a 4 percent real interest rate, and the results proved quite similar. The earnings stream from age 30 to the age of retirement is reduced by 15 percent to allow for income taxes and work related expenses. In addition, Social Security tax contributions made by employees are subtracted out.[2]

The Social Security earnings data report annual earnings up to the covered maximum. They also indicate the quarter in which the respondent exceeded the maximum, if such was the case. A procedure developed by Alan Fox (1976) was used to estimate earnings above the maximum for individuals who hit the ceilings in a particular year.

While the *Retirement History Survey* asks detailed net worth questions, two important components of the net worth of the elderly are not reported, consumer durables and the cash value of life insurance. The exclusion of these data from the net worth calculation biases the calculated values of R_A and R downward.

These estimates of pension wealth, Social Security wealth, and lifetime net labor earnings from age 30 to retirement are used to calculate the present expected value of all lifetime resources as of age 30. The computation of the present expected value of old-age resources is based on the 1969 values of net worth (NW), future net labor earnings ($FUTW$), Social Security wealth (SSW), and pension wealth ($PRNW$). The present-value calculations used to generate R are based on the same flows described above, with the exception that Social Security survivor benefits are ignored in the calculation.

These two measures of lifetime and old-age resources are both potentially biased because they fail to account for inheritances as well as contributions from children, items that are quite poorly reported in the surveys. To the extent that these inheritances and contributions from children have occurred prior to 1969, the estimate of lifetime resources will be undermeasured, while the estimate of future resources is correct. If, on the other hand, such family transfers primarily arrive in the future, both future and lifetime resources will be undermeasured. The former case is the more problematic for our estimate of the ratio of old-age to lifetime sustainable consumption, since the omission of preretirement transfers in the lifetime resources calculation will bias upwards the computed ratio of sustainable old-age consumption to sustainable lifetime consumption. However, the potential bias here seems benign; social policy towards savings is presumably concerned not with the intertemporal consumption allocation of family transfers, rather the intertemporal allocation of lifetime earnings and other lifetime resources, for example, pensions and Social Security that individuals can rely on receiving. In this context, systematic family net transfer payments can be thought of as a bonus. For purposes of this study, the appropriate lifetime resources base to consider can be thought of as excluding family transfers since social planners are presumably unconcerned whether a high ratio of old-age to lifetime consumption out of nonfamily transfer resources results from good planning, forced government Social Security, forced pension savings, or family transfers; their main concern is that this ratio be sufficiently high.

A. *Sample Selection*

Federal government employees and many state and local government employees are not covered by Social Security, and, hence, have no earnings records to use in the computation. These individuals were excluded from the analysis. A second group that was excluded is the self-employed. Many of the self-employed were first covered by Social Security starting in the late 1950's. For these individuals, the earnings records are obviously incomplete. In addition, quarters-of-coverage information is much more limited

[2] The earnings data are already net of the employer's contribution to Social Security.

TABLE 1— *R*-RATIO OF OLD-AGE CONSUMPTION STREAM TO LIFETIME CONSUMPTION STREAM, NO-ANNUITY CASE

Couple's Average Earnings	0–.39	.40–.49	.50–.59	.60–.69	.70–.79	.80–.89	.90–.99	1.00–1.09	1.10–1.19	1.20–1.29	1.30+	Total
$0–$2999												
Number	0	0	4	4	6	8	15	20	18	9	98	182
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	2.20	2.20	3.30	4.40	8.24	10.99	9.89	4.95	53.85	100
$3000–3999												
Number	0	3	2	2	11	10	13	12	15	15	60	143
Row Percent	0.00	2.10	1.40	1.40	7.69	6.99	9.09	8.39	10.49	10.49	41.96	100
$4000–4999												
Number	0	0	1	5	6	12	22	19	27	19	59	170
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.59	2.94	3.53	7.06	12.94	11.18	15.88	11.18	34.71	100
$5000–5999												
Number	0	0	1	4	11	20	26	30	20	26	77	215
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.47	1.86	5.12	9.30	12.09	13.95	9.30	12.09	35.81	100
$6000–6999												
Number	0	0	3	3	10	23	31	32	38	29	71	240
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	1.25	1.25	4.17	9.58	12.92	13.33	15.83	12.08	29.58	100
$7000–7999												
Number	0	0	2	3	15	17	29	42	52	33	61	253
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.79	1.19	5.93	6.72	11.07	16.60	20.55	13.04	24.11	100
$8000–8999												
Number	0	0	0	5	15	20	25	26	23	27	67	208
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.40	7.21	9.62	12.02	12.50	11.06	12.98	32.21	100
$9000–9999												
Number	0	1	1	7	6	10	12	21	29	28	50	165
Row Percent	0.00	0.61	0.61	4.24	3.64	6.06	7.27	12.73	17.58	16.97	30.30	100
$10000–11999												
Number	0	0	1	1	6	13	15	18	12	15	30	111
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.90	0.90	5.41	11.71	13.51	16.22	10.81	13.51	27.03	100
$12000+												
Number	1	0	5	8	17	18	31	38	29	39	91	277
Row Percent	0.36	0.00	1.81	2.89	6.14	6.50	11.19	13.72	10.47	14.08	32.85	100
Total												
Number	1	4	20	42	103	151	218	258	263	240	664	1964
Row Percent	0.05	0.20	1.02	2.14	5.24	7.69	11.10	13.14	13.39	12.22	33.81	100

for the self-employed than for employees. This fact precludes estimating earnings above the covered ceiling for the self-employed.

This paper focuses on married couples. Surviving widows, in many cases, worked only a limited amount during their lifetimes; since the decedent husband's earnings record is not available, there is no way of determining the widow's pre-1969 standard of living. Respondents were excluded from the basic sample if they failed to report a particular component of net worth or if they indicated receiving a pension benefit, but failed to state the level.[3] The ultimate sample numbers over 1,900 married couples. There are small variations in sample size across the following tables because of differing data requirements.

Tables 1 and 2 report the distributions of old-age to lifetime consumption ratios, cross tabulated by the average earnings level (in 1969 dollars) of the couple between 1951 and 1969. Both tables indicate that over 90 percent of married couples can afford an old-age level of consumption that exceeds 80 percent of their affordable lifetime consumption level; 85 percent of the couples can afford to purchase a larger annuity in their old age than they could afford to purchase at age 30; and 73 percent of elderly couples in the absence of annuity markets could afford to consume until age 88 at a constant higher level than the constant level of consumption they could have financed at age 30. The lower tails of the distribution are also of interest. According to Table 2, fewer than 1 percent of elderly respondents in 1969 faced implied reductions in their standard of living of more than 40 percent. Only 5 couples out

[3] The consumption ratios do not appear to be biased upwards because of the omission of those respondents who fail to report either their value of their expected pension benefits, or components of their wealth. Making the extreme assumption that all unreported components of wealth were zero, and including respondents with unreported wealth in the analysis, generated virtually no change in the distribution of R and R_A. The inclusion of those couples who have pensions, but who do not indicate their value in the analysis, has a trivial impact on the distributions even under the assumption that these couples will receive no pension whatsoever.

TABLE 2— R_A-RATIO OF OLD-AGE ANNUITY TO LIFETIME ANNUITY

Couple's Average Earnings	0-.39	.40-.49	.50-.59	.60-.69	.70-.79	.80-.89	.90-.99	1.00-1.09	1.10-1.19	1.20-1.29	1.30+	Total
$0-2999												
Number	0	0	4	4	4	7	6	13	15	11	118	182
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	2.20	2.20	2.20	3.85	3.30	7.14	8.24	6.04	64.84	100
$3000-3999												
Number	1	2	2	2	1	12	4	14	6	12	87	143
Row Percent	0.70	1.40	1.40	1.40	0.70	8.39	2.80	9.79	4.20	8.89	60.84	100
$4000-4999												
Number	0	0	1	3	3	10	8	8	20	12	105	170
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.59	1.76	1.76	5.88	4.71	4.71	11.76	7.06	61.76	100
$5000-5999												
Number	0	0	0	3	3	13	13	15	23	23	122	215
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.40	1.40	6.05	6.05	6.98	10.70	10.70	56.74	100
$6000-6999												
Number	0	0	1	2	4	12	14	25	21	20	141	240
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.42	0.83	1.67	5.00	5.83	10.42	8.75	8.33	58.75	100
$7000-7999												
Number	0	0	2	2	6	9	12	20	26	24	152	253
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.79	0.79	2.37	3.56	4.74	7.91	10.28	9.49	60.08	100
$8000-8999												
Number	0	0	0	3	4	10	16	19	19	17	120	208
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.44	1.92	4.81	7.69	9.13	9.13	8.17	57.69	100
$9000-9999												
Number	0	1	1	1	8	6	5	9	10	13	111	165
Row Percent	0.00	0.61	0.61	0.61	4.85	3.64	3.03	5.45	6.06	7.88	67.27	100
$10000-11999												
Number	0	0	0	1	3	1	14	10	8	17	57	111
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.90	2.70	0.90	12.61	9.01	7.21	15.32	51.35	100
12000+												
Number	0	1	1	4	9	14	16	10	25	30	167	277
Row Percent	0.00	0.36	0.36	1.44	3.25	5.05	5.78	3.61	9.03	10.83	60.29	100
Total												
Number	1	4	12	25	45	94	108	143	173	179	1180	1964
Row Percent	0.05	0.20	0.61	1.27	2.29	4.79	5.50	7.28	8.81	9.11	60.08	100

of the 1,964 couples in this sample had computed sustainable consumption ratios below .5. While these tables are based on an assumed 2 percent real interest rate, tables based on a 4 percent interest rate yielded virtually identical distributions.

The distribution of R_A is shifted to the right relative to the distribution of R. The ability to purchase an annuity enhances consumption opportunities the most when the ratio of current net worth to total present expected resources is the greatest. Hence, the ratio of C_A^0 to C^0 exceeds the ratio of C_A^L to C^L, and R_A exceeds R. The tables do not indicate any obvious correlation between these sustainable consumption ratios and the level of average earnings.

Table 3 presents the distribution of R, the consumption ratio under the no-annuities assumption for those couples with retired household heads. These couples appear somewhat less well-prepared for their old age than couples whose head is still working in 1969. For 13 percent of the couples, with retired household heads, retirement assets are insufficient to finance old-age consumption streams greater than 80 percent of the lifetime sustainable stream. The comparable percent for the entire sample is 9 percent. Under the annuity concept, 11 percent of retired respondents exhibit a ratio of old-age to lifetime sustainable consumption under .8; the overall sample percentage in this case is less than 5 percent.

For those couples with no private pensions, the distributions of the R_A and R ratios suggest somewhat less adequacy in old-age resources than for the overall sample. Under the no-annuity consumption concept, 12 percent of the couples without pensions had a ratio less than .8, while 7 percent had an annuity ratio less than .8. For the two subsamples of retired couples and couples with no pension, fewer than 1 percent of respondents indicate R and R_A ratios that are less than .5.

While readers should draw their own conclusions from the tables, the sustainable consumption ratios are high relative to our priors. Assuming unconstrained and nonmyopic

TABLE 3— *R*-RATIO OF OLD-AGE CONSUMPTION STREAM TO LIFETIME CONSUMPTION STREAM, NO-ANNUITY CASE

Retired Couple's Average Earnings	0–.49	.50–.59	.60–.69	.70–.79	.80–.89	.90–.99	1.00–1.09	1.10–1.19	1.20–1.29	1.30+	Total
$0–2999											
Number	0	2	7	8	14	20	15	14	8	25	113
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	6.19	7.08	12.39	17.70	13.27	12.39	7.08	22.10	100
$3000–3999											
Number	0	1	3	4	8	5	4	5	6	10	46
Row Percent	0.00	2.17	6.52	8.70	17.39	10.87	8.70	10.87	13.04	21.74	100
$4000–4999											
Number	0	2	1	5	8	6	8	10	6	3	49
Row Percent	0.00	4.08	2.04	10.20	16.33	12.24	16.33	20.41	12.24	6.12	100
$5000–5999											
Number	0	0	1	4	12	3	5	2	4	6	37
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	2.70	10.81	32.43	8.11	13.51	5.41	10.81	16.22	100
$6000–6999											
Number	0	0	0	0	2	7	9	5	6	9	38
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.26	18.42	23.68	13.16	15.79	23.68	100
$7000–7999											
Number	0	0	0	0	2	4	5	5	3	6	25
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.00	16.00	20.00	20.00	12.00	24.00	100
$8000–8999											
Number	1	0	1	3	6	2	1	2	1	0	17
Row Percent	5.88	0.00	5.88	17.65	35.29	11.76	5.88	11.76	5.88	0.00	100
$9000–9999											
Number	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	2	8
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	12.50	0.00	12.50	0.00	12.50	25.00	12.50	25.00	100
$10000–11999											
Number	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	2	1	1	9
Row Percent	0.00	11.11	0.00	0.00	11.11	0.00	33.33	22.22	11.11	11.11	100
$12000+											
Number	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	3	0	4	14
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	21.43	28.57	21.43	0.00	28.57	100
Total											
Number	1	6	14	24	54	50	55	50	36	66	356
Row Percent	0.28	1.69	3.93	6.74	17.17	14.04	14.45	14.04	10.11	18.54	100

stress, there is no evidence of significant undersaving. In viewing these numbers, it should be recalled that some individuals, even in the presence of perfect annuity markets, may prefer to consume at a lower rate in their old age than in their youth, while some couples may prefer the opposite. In the absence of perfect annuity markets, there is a fairly strong argument for rational, expected utility-maximizing individuals to plan to consume at significantly lower levels in their old age than in their youth. When annuity markets, or good substitutes, are not available, a consumer's probability of death will enter into his intertemporal optimization problem exactly like a higher rate of time preference. Real-world mortality probabilities would suggest a fairly steep decline in consumption with age when annuities are not available. Table 4 uses the *CES* utility function,

$$EU = \sum_{t=0}^{D} P_t \frac{C_t^{1-\gamma}}{1-\gamma} \alpha^t,$$

to calculate the optimal decline in consumption for a single individual with no access to an annuities market. The variable P_t is the probability of surviving to period t; D is the latest date at which the individual can remain alive. The term α is the time preference parameter and γ is the degree of risk aversion. The table indicates that a single male with a risk-aversion parameter of 1.75 would optimally consume at 65 only 85 percent of his age 55 consumption level. For risk aversion of .75, age 65 consumption is only 70 percent of age 55 consumption.

There are, of course, arguments for rising levels of consumption as one ages. There appear to be particular types of risks (such as the need for nursing home care) that are poorly insured by private markets. In addition, many elderly people appear to have a strong fear of becoming a burden to their children.

How do these numbers square with the standard findings from national surveys of the elderly that large fractions of the elderly

TABLE 4—AGE CONSUMPTION AND AGE WEALTH PATHS FOR SINGLE MALE WITH NO ANNUITIES

Age	Risk Aversion	Consumption	Wealth
55	.75	6825	$100,000
65	.75	4720	47,415
75	.75	2250	13,830
85	.75	395	1,420
95	.75	10	30
55	1.25	5465	100,000
65	1.25	4395	57,200
75	1.25	2810	23,675
85	1.25	990	5,165
95	1.25	110	475
55	1.75	4795	100,000
65	1.75	4100	52,680
75	1.75	2980	30,680
85	1.75	1415	9,505
95	1.75	295	1,690

Notes: Interest rate is 1 percent. Rate of time preference is 1 percent.

have little or no net wealth, and a larger fraction has no positive liquid wealth? The figures presented here are consistent with these facts. While fewer than 5 percent of married couples exhibit values of R_A that are less than .8, slightly more than one-third of couples reported levels of net worth that represent less than 10 percent of their total future resources. In addition, 67 percent of married couples held less than 10 percent of their future resources in liquid wealth. Of these couples, 21 percent had no liquid wealth whatsoever. Despite the fact that a significant fraction of the elderly have little or no liquid or illiquid wealth, their Social Security, pension, and earnings stream are sufficient to finance a level of old-age consumption that is as large or larger than they enjoyed in their youth.

Analysis of the rate at which the elderly consume their retirement resources provides another test of the ability of the elderly to cogently plan their old age consumption. Table 5 presents the ratio of the annuity that elderly couples could have financed in 1971 to the annuity they could have financed in 1969. A ratio close to unity suggests that couples are managing to provide a level consumption stream as they age. The table indicates that roughly 60 percent of couples have ratios of the 1971 affordable annuity that is within 10 percent of the 1969 affordable annuity. In 1971, 16 percent of couples could have financed an annuity that was more than 10 percent larger than they could have financed in 1969. On the other hand, almost 25 percent of 1971 couples could not have financed an annuity as large as 90 percent of the 1969 annuity; 6 percent of couples could not afford an annuity that was 70 percent of the 1969 annuity.

Our data provide no overwhelming prima facia support for the existing massive forced savings programs; they also provide no strong support for expansion of the Social Security and private pension systems. While this evidence provides little positive justification for forced savings, does it provide any compelling evidence against forced savings? To consider this question, the distributions of R and R_A were recomputed under the extreme assumption that in the absence of Social Security, all individuals would have fully consumed their tax contributions. The effect of setting all Social Security taxes and benefits to zero has a dramatic effect on the distribution of the ratios of old-age to lifetime consumption. In the case of the annuity ratios, over 40 percent of the sample would suffer at least a 20 percent reduction in their consumption levels in a world in which Social Security had no effect on private savings. Of this 40 percent, 20 percent would suffer over a 50 percent reduction in consumption, and 9 percent would suffer over a 70 percent reduction in consumption.

The results are even more impressive if one considers the subset of the population that is retired and that has no pension benefits. For this group, eliminating Social Security from the calculation and assuming no offsetting private savings response leaves 32 percent of the sample with a retirement annuity lower than one-third of their lifetime annuity. In the no-annuity framework, 65 percent of the sample would face a 50 percent or greater reduction in their standard of living.

These numbers are sufficiently dramatic to conclude that no strong case could be made for or against Social Security and other forced

TABLE 5—RATIO OF ANNUITY IN 1971 TO ANNUITY IN 1969

Couple's Average Earnings	0–.29	.30–.39	.40–.49	.50–.59	.60–.69	.70–.79	.80–.89	.90–.99	1.00–1.09	1.10–1.19	1.20–1.29	1.30+	Total
$0–2999													
Number	1	2	2	3	5	4	13	61	53	34	26	17	221
Row Percent	0.00	0.90	1.36	2.26	1.18	5.88	27.60	23.98	15.38	11.76	7.89	7.69	100
$3000–3999													
Number	0	0	1	1	5	3	24	64	41	32	9	10	190
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.53	0.53	2.63	1.58	12.63	33.68	21.58	16.84	4.74	5.26	100
$4000–4999													
Number	0	1	2	1	3	9	26	78	48	29	12	9	218
Row Percent	0.00	0.46	0.92	0.46	1.38	4.13	11.93	35.78	22.02	13.30	5.50	4.13	100
$5000–5999													
Number	2	0	1	7	3	6	37	116	72	25	8	11	288
Row Percent	0.69	0.00	0.35	2.43	1.04	2.08	12.85	40.28	25.00	8.68	2.78	3.82	100
$6000–6999													
Number	0	0	0	5	8	13	39	134	79	24	4	11	317
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.58	2.52	4.10	12.30	42.27	24.92	7.57	1.26	3.47	100
$7000—7999													
Number	0	0	3	5	14	14	43	152	63	23	12	11	340
Row Percent	0.00	0.00	0.88	1.47	4.12	4.12	12.65	44.71	18.53	6.76	3.53	3.24	100
$8000–8999													
Number	0	1	0	4	10	15	37	111	61	17	7	7	270
Row Percent	0.00	0.37	0.00	1.48	3.70	5.56	13.70	41.11	22.59	6.30	2.69	2.59	100
$9000–9999													
Number	1	1	1	4	5	17	39	94	42	10	3	4	221
Row Percent	0.45	0.45	0.45	1.81	2.26	7.69	17.65	42.53	19.00	4.52	1.36	1.81	100
$10000–11999													
Number	2	0	0	4	8	9	20	58	21	11	5	4	142
Row Percent	1.41	0.00	0.00	2.82	5.63	6.34	14.08	40.85	14.79	7.75	3.52	2.82	100
$12000+													
Number	2	3	12	19	11	34	92	124	40	12	12	14	375
Row Percent	0.53	0.80	3.20	5.07	2.93	9.07	24.53	33.07	10.67	3.20	3.20	3.73	100
Total													
Number	8	8	22	53	72	124	370	992	520	217	98	98	2,582
Row Percent	0.31	0.31	0.85	2.05	2.79	4.80	14.33	38.42	20.14	8.40	3.80	3.80	100

savings programs, based on the adequacy of resources available during retirement, unless and until one pins down the exact savings response to these programs.

IV. Explaining Individual Differences in the Adequacy of Savings

In this section, we study the determinants of individual savings adequacy. Two broad classes of variables are examined. First, the relation of savings adequacy to demographic characteristics is studied. Second, resource adequacy at retirement is related to the pattern of lifetime income receipts. Under the strict life cycle hypothesis with no capital market constraints or myopia, the level of wealth should be independent of the form and timing of lifetime income. If individuals do not foresee income streams such as Social Security or pensions, which come later in life, or if they do foresee them, but are unable to borrow against them, then persons receiving relatively more income in these forms should have more adequate resources available for retirement consumption.

Table 6 presents regressions relating the ratios R_A and R, old-age to lifetime consumption, to demographic variables and variables reflecting the form and timing of lifetime resources. *HOME* is a dummy variable which equals one if the family owns a home and zero otherwise. The variable *SSRAT* is the ratio of Social Security wealth to the present value of life-time resources from all sources—Social Security, labor income and pension benefits. *PRAT* is a similar ratio constructed using pension wealth (*PENW*), and *FRAT* is constructed in the same way using the present value of future labor income (*FUTW*). Equations (3) and (4) include the level of lifetime resources, *LTR*, and the product of *LTR* and *SSPRAT*, *PRAT*, and *FRAT*, respectively designated *LSSRAT*, *LPRAT*, and *LFRAT*.

The results for the demographic variables are quite consistent with a priori expectations. The adequacy of wealth accumula-

TABLE 6—EXPLAINING THE INTERTEMPORAL ALLOCATION OF CONSUMPTION

Independent Variables	Equation (1)	Equation (2)	Equation (3)	Equation (4)
	Dependent Variables			
	R_A	R	R_A	R
Constant	−2.134	−0.581	−1.813	−0.279
	(5.523)	(2.323)	(4.716)	(1.135)
Age	0.042	0.018	0.044	0.020
	(6.833)	(4.563)	(7.307)	(5.209)
ED 1	−.063	0.036	−0.088	−0.053
	(3.259)	(2.669)	(4.255)	(3.989)
ED 3	.085	0.045	0.079	0.047
	(2.734)	(2.281)	(2.586)	(2.435)
RACE	−0.087	−0.052	−0.113	−0.071
	(2.907)	(2.695)	(3.847)	(3.790)
HOME	0.102	0.064	0.120	0.078
	(4.525)	(4.404)	(5.462)	(5.534)
SSRAT	2.517	1.571	2.509	1.372
	(18.611)	(17.962)	(10.375)	(8.878)
PRAT	2.258	1.713	2.315	1.576
	(13.686)	(16.051)	(5.490)	(5.848)
FRAT	2.027	1.243	2.191	1.357
	(23.863)	(22.632)	(11.271)	(10.918)
LTR	–	–	1.5×10^{-7}	-2.3×10^{-7}
			(0.376)	(0.891)
LSSRAT	–	–	-1.2×10^{-5}	-8.1×10^{-6}
			(7.686)	(8.276)
LPRAT	–	–	9.0×10^{-7}	1.6×10^{-6}
			(0.505)	(1.402)
LFAT	–	–	2.3×10^{-7}	2.5×10^{-7}
			(0.247)	(0.409)
$\bar{R}^2$	0.3673	0.3595	0.4030	0.4009

Note: Absolute value of *t*-statistics are shown in parentheses.

tion rises sharply with education and is lower for minority groups. The magnitude of the coefficient implies that the consumption profile of nonwhites is 9 percent lower relative to that of whites during the retirement period. Education has an even greater effect; a 15 percent difference separates persons without a high school degree from those with a college education. As one would expect, home owners, *ceteris paribus*, have a higher level of retirement assets. Comparison of equations (1) and (2), or (3) and (4), shows that these results do not depend significantly on whether or not feasible consumption is calculated on an annuity basis.

The three variables reflecting the form and timing of lifetime income are all highly significant in all of our regressions. The equations based on the annuity concept imply that an increase of .1 in the fraction of lifetime income coming in the form of Social Security (the sample mean is .279) raises the ratio of sustainable old-age consumption relative to sustainable lifetime consumption by .25. Hence, for couples who would otherwise have a value of R_A equal to unity, the .1 increase in *SSRAT* would raise their value of R_A to 1.25.

The impact of private pensions and future labor income is similar. The coefficients imply that in the absence of Social Security and private pensions, consumption in old age relative to lifetime consumption would be about 40 percent lower for the average person. This finding suggests that, because of either capital market constraints or myopia, Social Security significantly raises the level of retirement consumption. Likewise, it implies that the crowding out of private savings is substantially less than dollar for dollar.

It was hypothesized above that if capital markets constraints are an important reason for the positive relationship between Social Security and savings, the relationship should be relatively more attenuated for more affluent persons who have higher lifetime incomes and more access to the capital markets. This suggestion is supported, in part, by equations (3) and (4), which reveal a significant negative interaction between the Social Security fraction of lifetime income, and lifetime income itself. However, a similar effect is not found for private pensions or future labor income.

V. Summary and Conclusion

The results in this paper suggest that there is currently no systematic problem of undersaving among the elderly population. The vast majority of the aged population can sustain a higher level of consumption than they could have financed at earlier ages based on their lifetime resources. While these data came from the early 1970's, the substantial increases in real Social Security benefits and real home prices that have occurred over the last decade suggest our conclusion would be strengthened if current data were available.

To a large extent, Social Security contributed to the sound financial position of the aged population. If Social Security were removed, and not replaced by private accumulation, a large fraction of the aged population would face very sharp declines in living standards. Our econometric evidence indicates that persons receiving more Social Security benefits have relatively higher levels of sustainable consumption at retirement. This finding suggests that Social Security may have made a substantial contribution to the economic welfare of the elderly.

While regressions suggest that government forced savings is successful in redistributing lifetime consumption from one's youth to one's old age, we urge some caution in viewing these results. To some extent the observed correlation between sustainable consumption ratios and the variables of Table 6 may simply reflect the fact that these future resource streams were unanticipated. For example, elderly couples who continue working may be couples who *ex post* turned out to be healthier than they had expected. Their private savings may have been predicated on the expectation of earlier retirement, but their unexpected good health permitted them to continue working. For these couples the positive correlations between the sustainable consumption ratios and the fraction of lifetime resources earned in old age could well reflect economic uncertainty rather than myopic or nonmyopic, but capital market constrained forced savings. Sorting out the issue of uncertainty versus the efficiency of forced savings is an important topic for further research.

Our research could also usefully be extended by considering more recent data, and by more fully exploiting the longitudinal character of the data. It might also be desirable to examine the economic situation of single persons, particularly widows, who are thought to suffer the most economic deprivation in old age. More fundamentally, our results underscore the need for a fuller understanding of the motivations for and determinants of individual saving.

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